The Tell-Tale Heart

Short Stories

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English 126

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Edgar Allan Poe’s Biography

Edgar Allan Poe (January 19, 1809 - October 7, 1849) was an American writer, considered part of the Romantic Movement. He was a poet, short story writer, editor, and literary critic. He is world famous for his dark tales. Poe was one of the earliest American writers to focus on the short story and is credited with inventing the detective fiction genre. Although his writings were well received, Poe struggled financially and was also plagued with "bouts of depression and madness."

Synopsis

This short story is about a person narrating the story of having killed an old man. He killed him because of the fear of the man’s pale blue eye. Every night, he went to the old man’s apartment and secretly observed the man sleeping. In the morning, he would behave as if everything were normal. After a week of this activity, the narrator decides, somewhat randomly, that the time is right actually to kill the old man. When the narrator arrives late on the eighth night, though, the old man wakes up and cries out. The narrator remains still, stalking the old man as he sits awake and frightened. The narrator understands how frightened the old man is, having also experienced the lonely terrors of the night. Soon, the narrator hears a dull pounding that he interprets as the old man’s terrified heartbeat. Worried that a neighbor might hear the loud thumping, he attacks and kills the old man. He then dismembers the body and hides the pieces below the floorboards in the bedroom. He is careful not to leave a clue of the murder. As he finishes his job, the narrator hears a knock at the front door. The police have arrived, having been called by a neighbor who heard the old man shriek. The narrator leads the officers all over the house without acting suspiciously. He even brings them into the old man’s bedroom to sit down and talk at the scene of the crime. The narrator is comfortable until he starts to hear a low thumping sound. He recognizes the low sound as the heart of the old man, pounding away beneath the floorboards. He panics, believing that the policemen must also hear the sound and know his guilt. Driven mad by the idea that they are mocking his agony with their pleasant chatter, he confesses to the crime and shrieks at the men to rip up the floorboards.

Analysis

When I started to read this story, and as I keep reading it, I was very shocked because of the narrator (the murder, and main character) lack of sensitivity for another human being life. He killed the old man because he couldn’t stand the old man’s eye. Yes, I was very shocked about that but at the same time, I was very amazed how the narrator explains to the readers, the details of his “cunning plan”. At some point I felt freaked out about it but, then I was asking for more details as I have continued to read it. In my opinion, the climax of the story, or when I felt the most suspense, was when the old man heard something and wakes up asking: “who’s there?”…

In this particular story, I found six literary criticism theories: Phenomenology, Reader Response, Structuralism, Dadaism, Historism, and Surrealism. I believe that there it is phenomenology, because the main character either perceives or see something that probably would not be. For example, when the narrator explain how he felt the old man’s heart beating very loud and the narrator compares it with the beating of a drum stimulating the soldiers into courage, or when the narrator said that he could not stand the old man’s eye because he thinks that the eye looks evil or something like that. Also, I think there is Reader Response, because like all of the readings that we read, we have a reaction either positive or negative based on the reader’s point of view or experience. In this case, my reaction was negative because I did not agree with the main character’s action. In other word, I don’t think that everybody have to kill someone because you can not stand something about other person. Structuralism is also in the story, because the narrator or the main character had already a plan in which he is going to get rid of the old man’s eye. The narrator explained how he hides every night and all of what he planned. Other literary criticism theory that I found was Dadaism. I think that in the story is Dadaism, because the main character or the murderer is against of the old man’s eye. He did not accept it and he thinks that it is an evil eye. Besides that literary criticism theory, I also found Historism. I think there is Historism, because the narrator his giving details of what he went through and all that happened during those eight nights. Surrealism is the last literary criticism theory I found. I think that there is Surrealism, because the narrator heard multiple times the old man beating, and that is product of his imagination. Also the narrator, at some point, put “Death” as a being, and I believe that Death is not.

I really enjoyed reading this short story by Edgar Allan Poe, and I think that was very entertaining and little bit scary, but I enjoyed reading it. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

References

*The tell-tale heart*. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.americanliterature.com/Poe/SS/TheTell-TaleHeart.html

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